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COLLABORATING WITH ASEAN TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND OTHER TRANSNATIONAL CRIMES



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The 2015 integration of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) Community will increase already expansive trans-border flows of goods, services, and people. While this will undoubtedly create economic opportunities, it also provides favorable conditions for transnational crimes, such as human trafficking, to continue to flourish. Though difficult to find accurate data, estimates suggest upwards of a quarter of a million people per year are trafficked within ASEAN. Yet only about 3,000 of those trafficked are categorized as TIP “survivors,” or victims who have been treated and returned home safely.

National-level TIP legislation varies dramatically throughout the region and the cross-border nature of human trafficking make consistent enforcement a challenge, leaving victims unrecognized or, worse, treated as illegal immigrants or criminals. Even when successfully repatriated, victims often fall through the cracks and are vulnerable to being re-trafficked when there is no proper support system in place to reintegrate them into society.

While procedures are often in place to deal with victims of violence, it is notable that most ASEAN Member States have not established procedures that address the particular needs of victims. Appropriately, attention to date has focused on the development of strong legal framework and criminal justice responses, however, the practical challenges of meeting victims’ needs remains largely unaddressed. As a result, even identified victims are not receiving appropriate care and treatment methods.

The United States Government, through the ASEAN-U.S. Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development and Security (PROGRESS) project, is supporting ASEAN in its efforts to strengthen regional response to victims of trafficking by:

- **Building consensus** – Providing support for a series of consultations convening ASEAN entities and other stakeholders to come to consensus on agreed upon regional standards on victim protection—consistent approaches that will eventually form the basis of nationally-adapted protocols.
- **Providing technical assistance** – Inform relevant ASEAN entities of the latest approaches from within ASEAN Member States and globally to inform broader understanding and best practices for treatment of TIP victims.
- **Tapping technology** – Explore innovative ways to track, identify, and assist victims, linking victims with law enforcement and exploring partnership opportunities with the private sector and social support agencies.
- **Supporting implementation at the national-level** – In onward years, seek to identify and support efforts to work with individual ASEAN Member States in the difficult, but necessary, task of implementing shared ASEAN standards.

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